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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ARABS VIEWED AS ETHNIC COMMUNITY WITH MOST
ECONOMIC CLOUT IN HONDURAS

1. A recent survey conducted in Tegucigalpa of 200 people over the age of 18 indicated that the majority of those polled view Arabs as having the most economic power in Honduras. Those surveyed were asked two questions: which ethnic community do you view as the most powerful economically; and also, a somewhat generic two-pronged question about the overall social image of each ethnic group. The following ethnic groups were evaluated in the study: Chinese, African, indigenous, Arabic, and Jewish.

2. After the Arab community, those perceived as having the most economic clout (in descending order) were the Chinese, Jewish, African, and indigenous communities. As far as hard work is concerned, those surveyed overwhelmingly viewed the Chinese as the hardest workers (71 percent), followed by the Arabs (12 percent), indigenous (11 percent), African (3 percent), and the Jewish community (2.5 percent). When those surveyed were asked what is your overall view of these ethnic groups, the Chinese came out first, with 92 percent of the people seeing them in a positive light. Following closely behind were the African and indigenous communities, with 89 percent and 88 percent, with the Arabic and Jewish communities receiving only 49.5 percent and 35 percent respectively.

3. With respect to the Arab community, although perceived as the most economically influential group, they are not necessarily well-liked. (NOTE: The Arab community in Honduras is overwhelmingly Palestinian-Christian, not Islamic. END NOTE.) The Chinese, however, are seen as being both powerful and having a positive social image, particularly in terms of being hard workers. The African and indigenous communities are viewed as having little economic power, but retain a good perception according to the survey.

4. COMMENT: Although there are no official statistics, it is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 of Honduras' six million inhabitants are of Arab descent, and of these, the great majority are Palestinian-Christian. By some estimates, no other country in the Western Hemisphere has a higher proportion of Arab immigrants and, in absolute numbers, Honduras ranks fourth after the United States, Canada, and Chile. Important figures of Arabic descent include: the former president Carlos Flores; the Canahuati family (textiles); and the Kafati family (coffee). Despite their economic clout, Arab-Hondurans are often the victims of prejudice or stereotyping.
Palmer